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1994

# Community Arts Partnership Act: Correspondence (1994): Correspondence 18

Doreen Bolger

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*Daniel*

April 29, 1994

Senator Claiborne Pell  
325 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Pell:

It was such a pleasure to meet you last night at Jane Alexander's presentation and to learn more about your thoughts about the Museum and its relationship to the Portuguese community--a group that contributes substantially to the cultural richness of the state.

I am writing to you in support of a matter that I consider of the utmost urgency--the Community Arts Partnership provision that Representative Eliot Engel authored for inclusion in Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). I understand that this measure is currently before the Senate Subcommittee on Education, Arts and the Humanities, which you chair, and that the American Association of Museums hopes that you will take a strong position in introducing this bill to your committee and the full Senate.

Your interest in and support of educational and arts issues is legendary in your home state. I am sure that you realize all too well how much our public school system needs more opportunities to take advantage of the cultural resources offered by an institution such as the one I recently came to Rhode Island to direct. The educators who work so tirelessly in our school districts are struggling--not just with teaching, but also with overwhelming forces of social change. In this context cultural "enrichment"--through collaboration with local museums, zoos, botanical gardens, and libraries--might seem like an extravagance. Indeed, it is *essential*; for many of the children who might be served through the Community Arts Partnership, school/museum initiated visits might be the *only* opportunity for exposure to cultural resources.

I would like to mention a few of the many programs currently offered by the Museum of Art in collaboration with local schools:

- *Studio in the Museum*: One of the most successful of the Museum's school programs, it serves seven public schools (two elementary schools, four middle schools, and one high school). Gifted students, selected by their teachers and principals, are bussed to the Museum for a series of eight ninety minute visits. Sessions combine direct contact with objects in a gallery setting, related studio experiences with practicing artists, and activities that encourage connections between the

visual arts and other aspects of the school curriculum, most often writing. The program won an excellence in education award from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Arts in 1990 and 1991. It is supported currently by a number of sources, including the Providence Department of Public Schools.

- *Art Talks*: Working in collaboration with Trinity Repertory Company and Rhode Island Philharmonic, the Museum offers 35 students from William M. Davies, Jr. Career and Technical High School, Lincoln, Rhode Island an introduction to the visual and performing arts. One activity included a tour of the Museum's holdings of Cubist works, with an in-school follow-up workshop on collage making. This program is supported through the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts.

- *Design Talks*: Working in collaboration with the Art Education Department of the Rhode Island School of Design, the Museum offers 20 students from Davies three curatorial sessions using chairs, teapots, flatware, and posters from the collection. The Art Education Department then offers studio sessions in the RISD studio facilities.

- *Providence Greenlinks*: In collaboration with the Southside Community Land Trust and Roger Williams Park Zoo, the Museum offers this program to 700 Providence third and fourth grade students, who study the aesthetic and environmental significance of trees. On visits to the Museum, students focus on landscape painting and on wood objects; at the Zoo, rainforest animals; and at the Arboretum, trees. Back in the classrooms, teachers implement art projects.

- *Museum Art Classes*: Subscription courses, taught by professional art teachers, are held after school for two eleven week semesters and serve 300 students annually. Ten percent of the participants are awarded scholarships on the basis of need and talent.

- *Education Gallery*: Students from all of the above programs have an opportunity to exhibit their work in displays for which the students often serve as "junior curators".

- *Teacher Workshops*: Hoping to achieve "the multiplier effect" by servicing the teachers who reach the at-risk students, the Museum regularly offers workshops to train teachers. One recent session, conducted in February, considered landscape art. During the summer the Museum offers a *Summer Teacher Institute*, an eight day intensive course that

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equips teachers to use works in the Museum's collection to present classroom themes in creative ways. The Rhode Island Department of Education grants teachers three in-service credits for participation in this program.

- *RISD Master of Arts in Teaching Program*: As an institution of higher learning, RISD also offers important programs in collaboration with the public school system. Paul Sproll of the Art Education Department works closely with the Veazie Street School, where he participates in the school's planning team and partnership committee. RISD Master of Arts in Teaching candidates work with Veazie teachers for their lab experience in an after-school studio program and in the Museum in a serial visit program. Students are also given passes for a free weekend visit to the Museum with their families.

These services are offered as a part of the Museum's overall educational program, which also includes in-Museum adult programs such as lectures and performances, gallery talks and symposia, family and children's programs, programs that address the needs of developmentally disabled adults and those with hearing impairments. as well as significant outreach programs, such as Senior Artlook (for elderly Rhode Islanders) and Museum-on-Rounds (for hospitalized Rhode Islanders). All this activity is generated by four full time and one part-time employee in the Museum Education Department. We would do more if we had greater resources.

In fact, if we had funding, we could revive an outstanding program that ran from 1989 to 1991--*Summer Literacy Program/Literacy and Dropout Prevention Program*. Over a period of five weeks, the literacy program taught reading skills through the visual arts, using fine art objects and art projects to reinforce cognitive skills, such as identification, discrimination, sequencing, and memory. An assistant museum educator, Carole Villucci, did the teaching and later teaching coordination for all the art instruction in this program, which served grades K through 4 in inner city schools through the Providence Department of Public Schools.

Finally, I feel I must also speak as the parent of a child currently enrolled in Rhode Island's public school system. My son Rusty Burke attends the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. School on Camp Street in Providence, only about a mile from the Museum of Art. I am sure that Stephen Kane, the principal who leads this elementary school with remarkable commitment, would love to be able to have his at-risk students take advantage of the Museum's resources. Many of the school's enrichment programs are currently sponsored by the PTO, which has both limited funds and expertise. A program like the

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Community Arts Partnership would foster more cultural programs at this school and indeed all over the state.

Rhode Island is a state rich in cultural resources. The challenge we face is finding a way to make them accessible and fascinating to new audiences. I urge you to support the Community Arts Partnership included in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

I look forward to meeting you and to having an opportunity to show you some of the outstanding educational initiatives already in place at the Museum of Art.

Sincerely,



Doreen Bolger  
Director

cc: Roger Mandle  
Paul Sproll  
David Stark  
Michael Franco

Mayor Vincent Cianci

Government Affairs  
American Association of Museums